“There are no limits to this thing”: Apocalypse and Human Identity in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*

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> "Strongest thing on this earth. Biggest explosion that ever happened—that's what the newspaper said."
>
> Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

> If, as Roethke writes, "in a dark time, the eye begins to see," apocalypse is a darkness that gives us light.
>
> Junot Díaz, "Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal"

> Bounded spheres of difference are desirable, so long as the boundaries are permeable, like human skin, rather than impenetrable, like fortress walls.
>
> Sidner Larson, *Captured in the Middle*

Leslie Marmon Silko's 1977 novel *Ceremony* narrates the experience of a World War II veteran named Tayo returning to his home at the Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico. Suffering from what white doctors quickly dismiss as shell-shock, Tayo pursues a healing ceremony under the guidance of a mixed-blood medicine man to address the convergence of his traumatic personal history, the history of violence against his community and all American Indian tribes, and the metanarrative of Western history, specifically at its most recent and destructive point: global war and atomic weaponry. Due to the apocalyptic potential of the bomb — the Trinity site development and testing of which serves as the geographic nexus of these histories — Tayo finds himself at a "momentary standstill of history," as theorized by Walter Benjamin in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (Scherpe 107). This point of crisis provides a "revolutionary chance" for Tayo to "read across the fragments of his experience and grasp the constellation of

forces that has produced him" and his suffering, and to thereafter rediscover a traditional Laguna notion of human identity (Benjamin 263, Beck 152). Tayo absorbs into and unites in his individual identity the entire global community of life that is subject to the destruction of the bomb — transcending ethnic, national, and tribal distinctions as well as connecting with the landscape and animal life of and around the Laguna Pueblo (Scherpe 108, Beck 152). By recovering, reclaiming, and revitalizing this hybrid and relational notion of human identity, Tayo is able to complete a healing ceremony that confronts both his individual trauma and the violence of witchery and Western ideology that contextualizes it.

My argument will first address the apocalyptic characterization of the bomb and the significance of apocalypse to Benjamin's theory of history. I will then discuss Tayo's sickness returning from the war as it relates to the convergence of his personal history with those of his people and of human civilization more broadly. The remainder of my argument will be an examination of the complex and composite identity that he rediscovers in his healing ceremony — one that bridges multiple ethnicities and unites with animal life and the land itself, culminating in the image of sunrise.

The bomb

At the core of Silko's text is an exploration of the seemingly paradoxical nature of the atomic bomb: its potential for universal destruction and, simultaneously, its promise of universal unification. As humankind develops the unprecedented capacity to incur obliterative devastation upon itself and all of creation, we also, consequently, provide a common denominator for everything that creation encompasses. The bomb creates the context for a universal vulnerability to violence and thereby exposes humanity's not mere coexistence but codependence with the

totality of life on the planet. Undoubtedly, more immediately readable as an implication of nuclear weaponry than this unification is the first aspect of total, apocalyptic destruction. The spectacular power of the atomic bomb enters the text via Tayo's grandmother, who inadvertently witnesses the Trinity testing of a nuclear device, a few hundred miles from the Laguna Pueblo. In recounting the sight to Tayo, she notes the seemingly solar brilliance of the blast, an impression so intense that it overwhelms both her and a friend's senses and compels the use of superlatives to articulate their experience:

> "It was still dark; everyone else was still sleeping. But as I walked back from the kitchen to my bed there was a flash of light through the window. So big, so bright even my old clouded-up eyes could see it. It must have filled the whole southeast sky. I thought I was seeing the sun rise again, but it faded away […] 'My, my,' I said to myself, 'I never thought I would see anything so bright again.' […] Romero came around. He said he saw it too. So bright that it blinded him for a moment; then later on he could still see it flashing when he closed his eyes. […] Later on there was something about it in the newspaper. Strongest thing on this earth. Biggest explosion that ever happened—that's what the newspaper said." (Silko 227-228)

This description strongly echoes the testimonies of government officials and others brought to witness the testing of a plutonium-based bomb at Trinity on July 16, 1945. Much like Tayo's grandmother notes that the burst of light is powerful enough to penetrate her degenerating eyesight, such accounts comment at length upon the stunning temporary blindness experienced at the hand of the "brilliant yellow-white light all around" (Domina 72-73, 75-76). One account further insists that the impact upon his senses was so overwhelming as to render him unable to report exactly what happened or what he saw (Domina 76). Additionally, just as the grandmother equates the scope of the flash with that of the rising sun, these testimonies describe the detonation as releasing a "ball of fire" (or, in one case, three) with such "heat and light [that it] were as though the sun had just come out with unusual brilliance" (Domina 72-73, 74). This

image in particular seems to encapsulate the dual nature of nuclear weapons: the trial run confirms the bomb's monstrous destructive capacity just as it simulates the sun itself — touching and illuminating everything, the sustaining life force that underpins all of creation. The analogy is a dangerous one: despite the awe and amazement that the bomb provokes, particularly at the testing stage when unprecedented violence is coded as success and met with celebration, it is crucial to keep in mind that its stupendous power is the product of conscious and calculated effort. While we may marvel that the sun rises each day in a splendor and seeming miraculousness no human achievement could rival, to regard "the false dawn of the blast" with the same uncritical wonder is to ignore that the bomb's power was deliberately concocted and realized, and moreover with a specific and explicit purpose: to kill (Beck 154).

The inarticulability of the individual event of the Trinity testing characterizes the broader discourse surrounding nuclear weapons. Much like the explosion of the bomb exceeded once inflexible physical limits — incurring destruction of previously impossible magnitude across a similarly impossible expanse of space with unthinkable speed — it also exceeded established frameworks of thought and language with which we might articulate the potential and experience of a nuclear blast. Catchphrases and pacifist campaign slogans such as "atomic plague," "atomic epidemic," "No place to hide," and "Keiner kommt davon ('No one can escape')" point to the extraordinary terror that "this new means of indiscriminate destruction" aroused in the consciousness of all the world (Nehring 169, 159; Domina 81). Consequently, in coming to terms with the reality and meaning of the bomb, critics across the globe abandoned what might be thought of as restrained and rational language to employ instead a diverse and often emotionally-charged "apocalyptic vocabulary" (Nehring 152).

As mentioned above, the spatial boundlessness of atomic violence was one of the most frequently discussed points on the matter. Once the potentialities of nuclear energy had been unleashed, it became clear that "human beings, like the sorcerer's apprentice, had released a power that they could no longer control" (Nehring 155). Atomic power was ubiquitous, its dangers imbuing every aspect of human life, "impossible to isolate" (Nehring 155). Beyond the immediate destruction of detonation, there was a sense that the backlash of the use of nuclear weapons would pervade unseen and unstoppable across even global distances, its reaches communing with the elements of nature and touching every member of the human race:

> It could hit the earth in the forms of "rain, radioactive, as dew, radioactive, as fog, dust or snow, all radioactive. No human being could be sure that it did not affect him." […] the "atomic cloud" was not different from the other air; it was just "a radioactively marked body of air," one thousandth of which would be enough to poison humankind. (Nehring 160)

As with the blast's similarity to the sun, these alignments of the bomb with precipitation and other atmospheric forces seem to indicate that it had introduced a new version of nature, fundamentally transforming if not replacing entirely the physical reality of the pre-Atomic Age.

Just as it transcends spatial distinctions, nuclear weapons also promised to collapse previously rigid temporal lines by means of nuclear fallout. Apart from an instantaneity of destruction unachievable with previous weapon technology, with the bomb today's detonation would inevitably mean tomorrow's desolation, spawning inestimable damages years and years into the future (Nehring 157). Among these concerns, anti-nuclear rhetoric of the post-war era frequently displayed an acute anxiety for the physical health of future generations, anticipating the extreme physical deterioration or mutation of the human race (Nehring 168). In tandem with these predictions of extinction via radioactive infection, "the themes of annihilation and chaos in the case of a Third World War" also saturated the discourse, returning perennially to the point

that what we do today can either stave off or ensure a future of perpetual war, sickness, and suffering (Nehring 158).

Unsurprisingly, such apocalyptic expectations often adopted religious or moral overtones to make intelligible the scope and intensity of the bomb's destructive capacity. Nuclear weapons were often framed by members of predominantly Judeo-Christian nations as evil or satanic, the realization of "demonic power" (Nehring 155, 168). Many perceived the bomb as an invitation for God's vengeful wrath, its seemingly supernatural power a form of "'blasphemy,' 'temptation of the Creator,' and 'human hubris'" (Nehring 169, 155). It fit snugly into Revelation's vision of the end of the world: "For one West German observer, the device became 'a horseman of the apocalypse… frightening, incalculable, threatening everyone in the same way, the non-guilty like the perpetrator, the unborn much more than the born'" (Nehring 157). J. Robert Oppenheimer himself, the "father of the atomic bomb," resorted to referencing the Bhagavad-Gita in attempting to articulate his reaction to the successful testing of the bomb at Trinity:

> We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita. Vishnu is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty and to impress him takes on his multi-armed form and says, "Now, I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." I suppose we all thought that one way or another. ("J. Robert Oppenheimer")

It seems that nuclear power resists rationalization, making doomsday rhetoric and calls to holy texts an attractive and highly useful framework for understanding its meaning and implications.

For citizens from nations responsible for the Manhattan Project or those engaged in the development of their own nuclear programs, the reality and meaning of atomic weaponry could not be grasped. For someone carrying a traditional Laguna worldview, Tayo seems to think it

would be almost pointless to attempt to explain the violence made possible by the technology of the Atomic Age:

> But the old man [Ku'oosh] would not have believed white warfare—killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died. It was all too alien to comprehend, the mortars and big guns; and even if he could have taken the old man to see the target areas, even if he could have led him through the fallen jungle trees and muddy craters of torn earth to show him the dead, the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous. Ku'oosh would have looked at the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines where human bodies had evaporated, and the old man would have said something close and terrible had killed these people. Not even oldtime witches killed like that. (Silko 33-34)

A Laguna considering of nuclear weaponry as "alien" and "monstrous" even in the face of the material, explainable evidence of its destruction jives with the apocalyptic characterization of atomic power examined above. It seems as though no cultural context can readily comprehend or make intelligible the violence that atomic weapons promise.

The ubiquity and variety of provocative vocabulary used to conceptualize atomic destruction points to what we might term the inherent unimaginability of apocalypse, both generally and as manifested by the bomb in particular. As the above examples illustrate, attempts to contextualize and envision nuclear devastation were by and large elaborate and sweeping in scope, but ultimately quite flat, reductive, and fantastic. Grounded in remote speculation and anticipation, they read as science fiction texts or religious fear-mongering, emotionally-charged rhetoric devoid of the experiential data necessary to incorporate it within the framework of lived reality. This follows a disjuncture present in the expectations of atomic weaponry formed just as the Manhattan Project was being conceived:

> Physicists realized that both nuclear fusion and nuclear fission could release incredible amounts of stored energy, and that this release, if a chain reaction could be created, would take the form of

> an explosion. Understanding this potential event in theory was nevertheless quite different from producing an actual explosion. Some scientists believed, in fact, that the process would prove impossible, and that this impossibility was nature's way of preventing human beings from acquiring such destructive power. (Domina 54)

Even in the seemingly objective context of determining what is physically, measurably, or materially possible, there is an immense gap between the idea of the bomb and the reality of the bomb. The apocalyptic destruction enabled by nuclear weapons carries implications that even as they are bounded by the laws of physics seem as though they must defy them, compelling scientists to disbelieve what they know to be true and resort instead to arbitrarily attributing free will to nature in forming their hypotheses for the project.

As post-war readers we have the unfortunate advantage of knowing that nuclear explosion is indeed very much possible, a privilege these physicists were not afforded and which consequently might justify their inability to fully come to terms with the bomb. However, atomic destruction is framed as a potential event — an idea, confined to the realm of the possible but not real — even *after* it has been actualized: in the aftermath of the Trinity testing, "what remains is […] the permanent dread of a disaster that can only be imagined, [but] never experienced" (Beck 155). More striking, even after the events of August 1945, the reality of the atomic bomb still could not be grasped: "the destructive powers of nuclear weapons were apparent, but […] despite Hiroshima and Nagasaki, people still perceived the threat of nuclear weapons along rather abstract lines" (Nehring 154). The images and language discussed in the preceding paragraphs are also products of the Atomic Era. Both in anticipation of the creation of atomic weaponry and standing quite literally in its rubble, it retains its unimaginability. Such apocalyptic destruction is only conceivable proleptically, beyond comprehension in the here and now. It presents a 'reality' so absolutely antithetical to any established notion of what 'reality' is so as to render that

'reality' unthinkable as an immediate experience and comprehensible only as a potential event. The temporary blinding that the Trinity testing inflicts upon its witnesses proves a microcosm of the bomb's exceeding of humankind's conceptual capacities in general. "Imagining nuclear dangers," as opposed to reporting or observing them, is at once our only option and an impossible feat (Nehring 152).

Benjamin and apocalypse

While the apocalyptic violence of atomic war defies definition or intelligibility, it by no means denies us the ability to respond to the reality-collapsing work that it accomplishes. In an article reacting to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Junot Díaz recounts James Berger's tripartite definition of the term "apocalypse":

> First, it is the actual imagined end of the world, whether in *Revelations* or in Hollywood blockbusters. Second, it comprises the catastrophes, personal or historical, that are said to resemble that imagined final ending—the Chernobyl meltdown or the Holocaust or the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan that killed thousands and critically damaged a nuclear power plant in Fukushima. Finally, it is a disruptive event that provokes revelation. The apocalyptic event, Berger explains, in order to be truly apocalyptic, must in its disruptive moment clarify and illuminate 'the true nature of what has been brought to end.' It must be revelatory. (Díaz)

This third definition evokes Walter Benjamin's theory of history. In brief, Benjamin theorized that throughout the course of history, moments of catastrophe rupture the historical narrative in "Messianic cessation[s] of happening" that provides the opportunity to realize and fight for an "oppressed past" (Benjamin 263). The "momentary standstill of history," prompted by an event that is inconceivable, unexpected, or cataclysmic, initiates what we might call a "'time out of time' (*Auzeit*), or a kind of 'no man's land'" from which the historical materialist might regard

history at a distance (Scherpe 107, 120). By virtue of this unmoored standpoint, each crisis in the historical framework offers a "revolutionary chance" to defy one history and activate another newly revealed one, to confront what is unthinkably destructive and nonetheless respond (Benjamin 263, Scherpe 108).

This process of subversion, illumination, liberation, and redemption in the wake of catastrophe serves ultimately as "a medium for self-discovery," a way to recognize and reclaim how we relate to history and consequently who we are (Scherpe 108, 123). Given the eschatological roots of Benjamin's theory, its implications for the apocalyptic conceptualization of atomic weaponry are clear, and furthermore widely acknowledged by the time of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: "There was agreement that 'the atom' had, for better or for worse, become the hallmark of a new period in human history" (Nehring 165). As the ultimate disruptive event — one that beyond pausing history redefines or ends it entirely — apocalypse stands as the monad at which "the 'monster' called humanity would realize itself in a completely negative and destructive event" (Scherpe 125). Essential to and inextricable from its capacity for total destruction, apocalypse is an enablement of self-revelation.

In Silko's text, the bomb, in constellation with the other destructive forces wielded by witchery and the Western ideology it advances, provides this historical interruption and compels precisely the sort of revolutionary self-discovery that Benjamin discusses.[1] It is in the latter half of the bomb's paradoxical nature that we can locate what exactly its apocalyptic potential reveals. As mentioned previously, the universal destruction that atomic weaponry represents is accompanied by its converse and complement: universal unification. By giving all of existence a shared vulnerability to destruction, the bomb serves as an all-embracing, uniting force (Piper

[1] That Benjamin repeatedly describes each of these catastrophic ruptures as a "blast" makes the relevance of the bomb all the more particularly appropriate (Benjamin 263).

494). Atomic weaponry, "in a crushing inversion, [brings] everything together in one final communion," collapsing distinctions among both different human populations as well as between human beings and all the elements of creation (Beck 153). This unity is the self-revelation that apocalypse enables in *Ceremony*: that of a human identity bonded with and defined essentially by this "global community" that consists of all life on planet earth (Piper 485). In response to the apocalyptic scenario that links his own personal journey with the progression of human history, Tayo becomes conscious of this macrocosmic human identity, a complex and composite set of commonalities and codependencies that involves all that is subject to the destruction of nuclear weapons:

> He had been so close to it, caught up in it for so long that its simplicity struck him deep inside his chest: Trinity Site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb, was only three hundred miles to the southeast, at White Sands. And the top-secret laboratories where the bomb had been created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the Government took from Cochiti Pueblo […] There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid […] the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the date the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (Silko 228)

This passage encapsulates what I will spend the remainder of my argument detailing. Tayo's personal journey is a nexus of the relationships and histories that atomic weaponry culminates — the metanarrative of the Western world, the forces of native witchery, the dispossession of American Indians and the Laguna people more specifically, the war, the bomb, and his own individual alienation and suffering. Here, Tayo recognizes how the bomb by virtue of its

destructive power creates the context in which the interconnectivity of “all living things” becomes apparent. The human identity that he realizes by the end of the novel serves as a sort of paradigm for what human identity must necessarily become in the Atomic Age, defined at the core by a shared destiny with all of creation. By absorbing into himself members of the entire human community and aligning with the animals and the land itself, Tayo’s healing seems to almost literalize Díaz’s call for the “superhuman solidarity” needed to confront the meaning of apocalypse (Díaz).

Here’s the rub: Benjamin’s concept of history is, at heart, cyclical. Though the moment of revolution “make[s] the continuum of history explode” and inaugurates what Benjamin terms a “new calendar,” what this rupture really achieves is the redemption of a past in the present (Benjamin 261). Catastrophe prompts not a new beginning but rather “reincarnates” something once defeated, during which the assignment of “the victor” might be re-accorded to those who have been “lying prostrate” under the “triumphal procession” of historical progress (Benjamin 261, 256). By reiterating this, I mean to make the point clear that the bomb does not in its historical interruption allow for a *new imagining* of human identity, but rather a *remembering*. In *Ceremony*, the “oppressed past” is that of a traditional Laguna and more generally American Indian notion of the human that contradicts the dominant Western anthropocentric model that with time threatens to monopolize human self-understanding (Benjamin 263). For Tayo, the development of nuclear weapons enables a return to a notion of the self rooted in his Laguna heritage: “human identity is linked with all the elements of creation” (Silko “Landscape 1005). Sidner Larson makes clear that an “inclusive concept of personhood is not postmodern at all, but actually a premodern cornerstone of American Indian traditional worldviews” (Larson 51-52).

Tayo is not a pioneer, but a messiah; he does not emerge, but rather re-emerges into a forgotten, revitalized macrocosmic human identity.

Returning from war: atomization, alcohol, and smoke

Tayo's conception of his individual human identity, then, proves inextricable from the metanarrative of human history that includes the development of atomic weaponry. Returning to the Laguna Pueblo after military service in the Pacific during World War II, he confronts a convergence of the psychological, political, cultural, and environmental dimensions of witchery that exceed but define his personal journey: "Tayo's story is part of a greater story, and to find his way back to himself, Tayo must learn how to identify his position within the story" (Domina 93). A critical component of this reconciliation involves understanding his involvement in the war as it relates to American Indian genocide. Without undermining the immense impact that military service specifically has upon Tayo and other veterans, the significance of World War II in the context of their lives cannot be understood fully as "a discrete historical event with singular consequences" but "as a particularly brutal instance of a far longer process of deracination" (Beck 149). The medicine man Betonie makes this clear by explaining that the arrival of Europeans on the continent, the subsequent subjugation of American Indian peoples, and the global scope of modern warfare are all part of a genealogy of carnage set into motion by Native witches (Freed 230). As Tayo plunges deeper into his healing ceremony, he understands how these histories of violence correlate, insisting that in compensation for stealing the land from American Indians, "they [white people] tried to glut the [resulting] hollowness with patriotic wars and with great technology and the wealth it brought" (Silko 177-178). The war and the history of the destruction of Native peoples are experienced by Tayo and his fellow Laguna

veterans as kindred forms of exploitation and dispossession at the hand of white power: "We fought their war for them […] But they've got *everything*. And we don't got shit, do we? […] They took our land, they took everything!" (Silko 51). Their service in the military and its traumatic consequences are not isolated incidents of violence and injustice, but rather "simply the latest manifestation of a five-hundred-year struggle for survival" (Beck 149).

With alcoholism in particular, the link between the trauma of war and that of white domination as they relate to Tayo's story becomes particularly clear. When a white doctor claims that the medical community has observed an emergent pattern of drinking and violence among American Indian World War II veterans, Tayo shoots down the local characterization of the phenomenon:

> Tayo shook his head when the doctor finished reading the report.
> "No?" the doctor said in a loud voice.
> "It's more than that. I can feel it. It's been going on for a long time."
> "What do you think it is?"
> "I don't know what it is, but I can feel it all around me." (Silko 49)

Tayo here points to alcohol's function as a response to the compound trauma suffered by American Indians across generations as they witness the dissolution of their cultures and communities (Domina 130). Domina notes that "Native Americans themselves fervently believe that the systematic destruction of their traditional cultures is a significant factor in the level of addictions in their communities," that the inordinately high rates of alcoholism amongst their people are grounded in a much longer history of subjugation (Domina 129). So, while white doctors and Lagunas like Auntie and Grandma "blame the war" for Tayo's and his friends' alcohol abuse, the veterans' drinking symptomatizes a much more fundamental disruption of their community's safety, security, and self-determination, one inflicted and perpetuated by white settlers (Silko 49).

By understanding World War II in the context of violence against American Indian peoples, Tayo is able to locate his personal experience during and after the war within the increasingly destructive metanarrative of Western history. Although while in the South Pacific Rocky insists that he and Tayo's participation in the war fulfills a certain duty — "But, Tayo, we're *supposed* to be here. This is what we're supposed to do" — Tayo senses that this complicity serves and perpetuates a course of history that is ultimately harmful to himself, his loved ones, and the global community in its entirety (Silko 7). His mourning of family members who have died as a direct result of the war and his mourning of the destruction he witnesses in the world generally are one and the same: "He cries because they are dead and everything is dying" (Silko 14). There is the suggestion here that the tendency of human history folds into the lived reality of a single Laguna veteran. Just as the war cannot be understood without the multiple historical contexts that made its global violence not only possible but logical, Tayo cannot fully comprehend his personal story without examining a similar array of historical contexts that have contributed to his suffering. As a site where many histories converge, Tayo's journey encapsulates the inextricability of the local from the global, the recent from the long-term, the personal from the political: "geopolitics begins at home in *Ceremony*, and the novel seeks to map the global network that links the interiority of its protagonist with environmental despoliation at home and at war overseas" (Beck 151).

To heal, Tayo must recognize the intimate connection between his individual trauma and broader sociohistorical patterns. However, this macrocosmic conception of personal trauma differs from dominant Western values of individualism and self-reliance, which were particularly acute during the immediate post-war era: "with the rollback of New Deal and wartime emphasis on collective endeavor and a reinstatement of the individual as the core unit of democratic

freedom, while vulnerability and insecurity may be pervasive across society, the consequences are left with the individual as a private problem" (Beck 135). This emphasis on the individual as a discrete entity, unfettered and unaffected by the dysfunctions and maladies of the cultural or historical contexts, explains the veteran hospital doctors' inability to effectively treat Tayo's sickness: "White doctors function under the assumption of individual responsibility, and so reinforce that myth within their subjects. Rather than viewing the body as part of a macrocosm – the world – white medicine reads the body as a microcosm in and of itself" (Piper 489). The dominant conception of the individual takes very little if any account of circumstances beyond the scope of individual experience; traumas that manifest on this level are consequently dealt with microcosmically. The wisdom of this approach nearly convinces Tayo, but as he grapples with the embedment of his personal narrative within the historical contexts discussed above, he realizes that a more holistic healing ceremony will be necessary to address the complex and composite nature of his human identity:

> He wanted to yell at the medicine man, to yell the things the white doctors had yelled at him—that he had to think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like 'we' and 'us.' But he had known the answer all along, even while the white doctors were telling him he could get well and he was trying to believe them: medicine didn't work that way, because the world didn't work that way. His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything. (Silko 115-116)

The continued denial of Tayo's placement within a constellation of political, environmental, and cultural "sicknesses" acts to perpetuate his individual sickness. This subjection to a process of atomization lies at the core of what he must overcome in his healing journey.

Tayo's personal story is, however, at the mercy of the broader metanarrative of Western history, which includes the ascendance of the "cult of the individual" in coordination with

modern society and its foundation of liberalism, rationalism, and capitalism (Marske 1). Tayo seems to suffer from what we might call the "malaise of the modern man: he is alienated from his family, his community, his land, and his own past" (Sands 230). This experience of isolation presents a particularly dangerous threat to American Indian cultures that define "human beings as fundamentally part of a community rather than as naturally separate beings" (Larson 131). In Laguna culture specifically the "atomization or dissolution of the community" represents nothing short of the "death" of tribal identity (Piper 484). In dominant Laguna understandings of the self, individual alienation and "cultural alienation" — the latter of which includes the "eradication of cultural traditions, a history, and national character" that are so integral to the postcolonial condition and that connect individual and group histories to broader state, international, or even global histories — are inextricable and in a sense synonymous: the removal of the individual's historical and cultural context ultimately renders the 'individual' meaningless (Dreese 15, Ganser 148, Ronnow 70). While the "erasure of context or relation" constitutes the "white subject," such processes of separation, division, and mutilation represent the *deconstitution* of an American Indian subject (Piper 489, Larson 141, Ronnow 70).

The equation of a white sense of self with an atomized sense of self is something Silko seems to have taken quite literally. Imagery of smoke dominates the aesthetic of Tayo's trauma, a combination of the phenomenon of physical disintegration from a larger body and literal whiteness that produces a sense of self that "drifts" and "fades" into its surroundings, "invisible," "inanimate," and "insubstantial" (Silko 14, Domina 91). Tayo's constitutive parts are metaphorically detaching from one another at the atomic level as he dissolves into immobility and unthinkingness to "merge with the walls and the ceiling, shimmering white, remote from everything" (Silko 30). Tayo pines for this sensation of less-than-existence that the white

medicine affords him, which dispels his nightmares, precludes deep reflection, and disables him from analyzing the complex histories that inform his sickness. He asserts that living as white smoke makes life easy primarily because "smoke had no consciousness of itself" (Silko 14). Here, the process of atomization evoked by the image of white smoke is correlated explicitly with an absence of self-recognition, implying that once Tayo begins resisting the impulse to disintegrate he opens up the possibility of perceiving and understanding his identity in a way that an atomized version of himself cannot (Silko 14). In other words, the identity compelled by white society is an incomplete one; he must reintegrate himself and his story into that of his people and furthermore that of Western civilization to realize his full self.

The mental state that Tayo inhabits while living as "white smoke" accommodates the narrative of violence propelled by witchery and Western ideology that includes the war and the development of atomic weaponry. In the hospital, Tayo loses all emotional attachment and concern for those he has lost and does not suffer from the debilitating flashbacks of his time overseas and his last moments with Rocky: "I wasn't afraid there. I didn't feel things sneaking up behind me. I didn't cry for Rocky or Josiah. There were no voices and no dreams" (Silko 113). In anesthetizing him to pain, the white doctors prevent him from feeling anything at all, the medicine "silencing the sensations of living, the love as well as the grief" (Silko 213). Tayo ceases to "be alive" in any meaningful sense of the term, and even resents that he should continue living without wanting to anymore (Silko 36). When he gives up the will to live, he frames it in terms of smoke: "he waited to die the way smoke dies, drifting away in currents of air, twisting in thin swirls, fading until it exists no more. His last thought was how generous they had become, sending him to the L.A. depot alone, finally allowing him to die" (Silko 15). This emotional evacuation echoes a concern voiced by Ernst Jünger that rather than respond to atomic

weaponry with unintelligible horror, people might instead not respond at all: "Yet, if the apocalyptic attraction of the bomb is reinterpreted therapeutically so that it becomes an 'anthropological event' of self-discovery, the danger is […] the subject's becoming unable to feel pain, a state characterized by the absence of pain, in which the individual's capacity to resist gives up its last line of defense" (Scherpe 124). The catastrophe of apocalypse cannot activate a moment of revelation and revolution if humanity no longer cares to do so. This disaffect is precisely what the forces of witchery seek to encourage:

> The destroyers, they work to see how much can be lost, how much can be forgotten. They destroy the feeling people have for each other. […] Their highest ambition is to gut human beings while they are still breathing, to hold the heart still beating so the victim will never feel anything again. When they finish, you watch yourself from a distance and you can't even cry—not even for yourself. (Silko 213)

In constellating Tayo's story, the bomb, and the legacy of violence perpetrated by white settlers against American Indian peoples, the indifference to destruction that characterizes Tayo's response to the war is the same that underpins the plight of the impoverished Indians living by the river in Gallup, as Betonie makes clear:

> "That's true […] you [Tayo] could go back to that white place […] But if you are going to do that, you might as well go down there, with the rest of them, sleeping in the mud, vomiting cheap wine, rolling over women. Die that way and get it over with […] In that hospital they don't bury the dead, they keep them in rooms and talk to them." (Silko 113)

Tayo's yearning for oblivion does not signify his own weakness or personal failure; the impulse to fade away like smoke accords with the intentions of witchery to rid us of what makes us human.

The process of disintegration evoked by the image of smoke resonates with Tayo's experience of drunkenness, which similarly causes him to recede from reality and enter a stupor

of unthinking, unfeeling numbness. When Tayo drinks with his veteran friends, he becomes quiet, repeatedly drawing into himself and ceasing to think critically about the events in his environment or inside his own head: “He was beginning to feel a comfortable place inside himself, close to his own beating heart, near his own warm belly; he crawled inside and watched the storm swirling on the outside and he was safe there; the winds of rage could not touch him” (Silko 37). These sessions are activity without meaning or purpose, a temporary stilling and stifling of the pain rather than an effective countermeasure: “The drinking and hell raising were just things they did, as he had done sitting at the ranch all afternoon, watching the yellow cat bite the air for flies; passing the time away, waiting for it to end” (Silko 156). When he drinks, Tayo punts the question as to why he is sick, how he will recover, and how these subjects relate to more fundamental questions about his identity. In the context of American Indian communities in general, Domina points out, in a curiously appropriate choice of words, “alcohol use leads inevitably toward physical, spiritual, and cultural *dissolution*” (my emphasis, Domina 125). Consequently, “sobriety seems to be a prerequisite to his spiritual recovery,” as Tayo refuses to disintegrate out of consciousness and confront the imbrication of his personal history with his cultural and historical context (Domina 125).

The atomizing effect of drinking is tied explicitly to the violence, hatred, and dehumanization that sit at the center of the ideology of witchery. Emo, Harley, and the other veterans participate in ritual acts of drinking and storytelling that valorize the degradation of human life underpinning the increasingly violent nature of warfare, of which the bomb represents a culmination (Silko 53-55). Fading out of consciousness with each beer, they regale their sexual exploits and acts of torture inflicted upon Japanese prisoners, acts of objectification that become tangible when Emo reveals his collection of Japanese soldiers’ teeth that he shakes like dice and

positions in his mouth “at funny angles” with a horrifying callousness (Silko 57). Silko makes a clear connection between this behavior and the culture of World War II: “These good times were courtesy of the U.S. Government and the Second World War. Cash from disability checks earned with shrapnel in the neck at Wake Island or shell shock on Iwo Jima; rewards for surviving the Bataan Death March” (Silko 36). Emo’s violent tendencies represent the continuation of the logic of war after it has supposedly ended, the natural outgrowth and sequential phase in the narrative of witchery. The tragedy of the situation becomes clear when considering that at the base of the veterans’ dehumanizing ritual is the desperate need to find a place in American culture and community, to make real a sense of identity that the war, however heinous, had given them: “bring back that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the war” (Silko 39). The identity that they achieve, however, is fleeting, and offers no genuine healing for the trauma they have suffered.

Ethnicity: enemy and mixed-blood identifications

Tayo’s healing, then, is centered upon a rejection of the isolating, atomizing effects of the witches’ ideology and a recognition of a human identity that is relational and composite. A critical first step in realizing this identity concerns the experience that is most traumatic for Tayo — his improbable, potentially hallucinatory identification of a Japanese soldier with his Uncle Josiah while in the Philippines. Tayo’s unit is ordered to execute Japanese troops, and because he fails to distinguish between the Japanese enemy and a member of his family, he cannot bring himself to participate in the slaughter (Silko 7). At the time of the incident and in retrospect for some time after, Tayo carries two conflicting beliefs: an absolute conviction in Josiah’s presence

in the South Pacific jungle and a sensible understanding that his uncle could not realistically have left the Pueblo:

> "My uncle Josiah was there that day. Yet I know he couldn't have been there. He was thousands of miles away, at home in Laguna. We were in the Philippine jungles. I understand that. I know he couldn't have been there. But I've got this feeling and it won't go away even though I know he wasn't there. I feel like he was there. I feel like he was there with those Japanese soldiers who died." (Silko 114)

Note the diction employed to articulate the two impressions: the seemingly rational, objective actions of "knowing" and "understanding" in opposition to what he "feels." Yet the logos/pathos binary is not quite so neat, the types of knowledge not so discrete. In the narrator's initial account of the incident, Tayo surprisingly "knows" that Josiah is there in the jungle. Even more striking, Silko in places abandons entirely the notion that Josiah's presence is merely Tayo's perception and instead reports Josiah's presence as what factually occurs:

> In that instant he saw Josiah standing there […] Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he *knew* it was Josiah; and even after Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was *still* Josiah lying there […] Tayo started screaming because it wasn't a Jap, it was Josiah. (Silko 7)

Here, an unlikely reality that seems to be confined to Tayo's own psyche seeps into the third-person narration, indicating that Silko refuses to privilege one type of knowledge over the other or to distinguish between an objective reality and an individual's impression of event. She does not concede that Tayo was merely hallucinating but withholds from the reader the satisfaction of "knowing" that it was definitely not an illusion.

In any case, Tayo's identification of a relative — a close father figure, no less — with a Japanese soldier continues long after his return to the Pueblo, where he is haunted in his dreams and waking hours by voices that oscillate between Japanese shouting and calls from his uncle,

the voices spilling into one another to the point of becoming indistinguishable (Silko 5). Tayo's sentiment that a Japanese soldier *was* his uncle and vice-versa — albeit infeasible from a pragmatic viewpoint — is not terribly far-fetched, Domina reminds us: "all people are ancestrally related […] every person who kills another murders a relative, even in times of war" (Domina 51). Even more specific than the familial connection shared by all humans, indigenous populations of North and South America are believed by the majority of Western anthropologists to have migrated from Asia (Domina 51). Betonie reminds Tayo of this common ancestry: "'The Japanese,' the medicine man went on, as though he were trying to remember something. 'It isn't surprising you saw him with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers'" (Silko 114-115). Betonie's dating, which coheres with Western estimations of the migration across Beringia, situates the two groups in close familial proximity, their roots intertwined recently enough that he seems to still "remember" this relationship (Marder 11). The two communities' common ancestry is suggested again during the origin story of the witchery, when present at the witches' conference were several American Indian groups and, among others, representatives with "slanty eyes" (Silko 123). The specific mentioning of this community in the catalogue of attendant tribes indicates that Tayo's supposed hallucination seems to be an echo or a most recent manifestation of a truth acknowledged by both Western scholars and leaders within his own tribe: that the human community in its entirety, and American Indians and the Japanese in particular, belong to the same family.

The shared history between an American Indian person and a Japanese person is not confined to the ancient past or to Laguna mythology. The two groups derive further commonality from a shared experience of apocalyptic violence. Needless to say, in the context of World War II, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki positions the people of Japan as victims of an

unprecedentedly extreme destruction, the former having eventually "emerged as synonym for man-made apocalypse" (Nehring 159). Along a similar line, the indigenous peoples of America were subject to "the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world," with precontact hemispheric and north of Mexico population estimates at 145 million and 18 million, respectively — numbers which had diminished by 95% by the time the twentieth century began (Larson 49, 50). Sidner Larson characterizes the magnitude and intensity of this loss as nothing short of apocalypse:

> A way to start this story is by acknowledging that American Indian people have recently experienced the end of the world. It is ironic that Indians are so strongly associated with horses, for it has been their lot to "Behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him" (Rev. 68). They are postapocalypse people. (Larson 18)

Although atomic warfare creates a universal human community by virtue of its violent potential, the devastation suffered by these specific populations aligns them together in a particularly striking way. The Japanese are a more recent victim of the obliterative forces of Western power that have been working against the Laguna Pueblo and other American Indian tribes since the first European settlers arrived (Beck 154). The similar methodologies and justifications of the internment camps for Japanese-American citizens during the course of the war and of the US Indian reservation system provide additional evidence of the groups' common ground, sharing the status of "an internally colonized minority" (Freed 223).

Japanese and American Indians find themselves victim to the same increasingly brutal "forms of marginalization and state-sponsored violence of US imperial power" (Freed 223). Posited by "U.S. wartime discourse as nationally and ethnically other," both have been historically "defined by white America as threatening, racialized others" using damaging "language appellations" (Freed 223, Larson 21). Just as Rocky yells at Tayo, crying over the

corpse of the Japanese soldier he believes to be Josiah, "'Tayo, this is a *Jap*! This is a *Jap* uniform!'" similarly dehumanizing names have been wielded to justify the subjugation and extermination of American Indians (Silko 7). Larson notes that "words such as *savage*, *enemy*, *them*, and *other* create the objectification necessary for one group to treat another as if the members were not fellow human beings" (Larson 21). The last three listed are certainly applicable to Americans' regard for the Japanese and even Japanese-Americans, their fellow citizens, in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor and throughout the course of the war. In this sense, the groups are merely different expressions of the same phenomenon, identical forces of violence and hatred inflicted upon multiple communities. In believing his own family to be a Japanese soldier, refusing to participate in a violent act against them, and affirming his conviction in the face of disbelieving white doctors and fellow Lagunas alike, Tayo calls attention to the arbitrary assignment of such labels and the oppressive and destructive cleavages they create and justify (Ganser 155).

The alignment of Japanese and American Indian figures occurs elsewhere in the novel. While imprisoned soon after the Bataan Death March, Tayo remarks repeatedly upon the likeness of a particular Japanese soldier to a Navajo friend from his school (Silko 40). The similarity takes root so tightly in Tayo's mind that he begins addressing the soldier by his friend's name and attempts to reminisce about their imagined shared past (Silko 40). As with the incident when Tayo perceives his uncle Josiah to be one of the Japanese, the association between these two figures is not limited to Tayo's own thoughts and actions but spills into the narrator's account as well: frustrated with Tayo's seemingly insane behavior, the Japanese soldier shoves him away, "the way a small child would be pushed away by an older brother" (Silko 40). Here,

the two, though ostensibly members of separate ethnicities, are framed as brothers, members of a human family that stretches across oceans and beyond enemy lines.

A last example of Japanese alignment occurs at Tayo's release from the veteran hospital. Effectively dumped at the Los Angeles train depot, he encounters a small Japanese boy wearing a US Army hat (Silko 16). Later, in reflecting upon this strange moment, Tayo inadvertently confuses the boy's face with that of his brother Rocky (Silko 17). On one level, these images are an additional association of Japanese people with Laguna people, by virtue of both Tayo's muddling of the boy and Rocky's faces and the two Laguna brothers' time in the U.S. armed forces. The irony that two American Indians would serve a country founded upon the cruel and systematic destruction of their people mirrors that of a Japanese-American sporting Army gear in the years immediately following the internment of Japanese-American citizens — a history Tayo does remark upon during the scene at the station — or, more strikingly, in the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Silko 16). The Japanese boy becomes associated not only with soldiers like Tayo and Rocky but with all American soldiers and the US military in general, a force that would seem even more difficult to reconcile with Japanese identity than American Indian communities. The three — the Japanese, American Indians, and the United States in its most imperialist manifestation — are intertwined. On another level, it is critical to note that a *child* wears the Army hat, rendering the image not just a convergence of the three groups but a gesture of futurity that may anticipate the further collapsing of ethnic and national interests and identities in the post-war era. What Tayo comes to realize over the course of the novel regarding his own identity's interconnectivity with people from across the globe this Japanese boy already symptomatizes and potentially will experience with greater severity. This gesture of futurity finds chorus in one of Tayo's observations from the Philippines: "They looked tired too, those

Japanese soldiers. Like they wanted this march to be over too" (Silko 40). Global war here provides the experience necessary for supposed enemies to unite behind the pursuit of a common goal: to end the violence.

The convergence of Japanese, Laguna, and American identities in the above examples reflects the novel's broader concern with the "overdetermined nature of identity and the difficulty of clearly defining ethnicity" (Domina 20). Larson notes that the contemporary American Indian novelist necessarily engages questions of ethnic identity at the core of his or her work, exploring to some degree if not centering the text upon American Indian identity's "mixed, relational, and inventive" nature (Larson 26). These indeterminacies and complexities come into play even in the supposedly rigid legal constraints imposed upon tribal definitions by the US government:

> The power to define a *tribe* legally (but not socially, politically, or anthropologically) resides solely with the federal government. The power to define what it is to be an *individual* Indian or tribal member resides in part with the federal government, but there is also substantial tribal authority to define individual membership. At the same time, the tribes have inherited the blood-quantum legacy and, for practical purposes, have not been able to move beyond it. All these elements contribute to an extremely complex conception of identity. (Larson 31)

The assignment of ethnicity is a process of power involving multiple parties and multiple sets of values and aims. For many tribes in the Southwest in particular, the neat division between what it means to be and not be an American Indian in popular discourse has been unclear because at the time of white settlement they were agriculturally-based communities and did not lead the nomadic lifestyle associated with indigenous peoples: "Some Americans argued that the Pueblo people weren't 'really' Native Americans […] No one, however, seriously argued that Pueblo people were identical to white people, or even had equivalent rights as white people" (Domina

20). The point here is that even in circumstances that seem dominated by essentialist notions of identity, it is exceedingly difficult to distill out the singular ethnic core that determines "who" an individual is. Each person is defined in relation to other members of the human community, whether by their differences or their startling similarities:

> Tayo had realized that the man's skin was not much different from his own. The skin. He saw the skin of the corpses again and again, in ditches on either side of the long muddy road—skin that was stretched shiny and dark over bloated hands; even white men were darker after death. There was no difference when they were swollen and covered with flies. (Silko 6-7)

Tayo's observation here reminds us of the critical role that death plays in revealing the common humanity that unites us all. Discussions of ethnicity may hint at the mutual imbrication of seemingly distinct cultural and community identities, but nothing serves as more vivid evidence of the inextricability of these than the shared vulnerability of our lives.

As a mixed-blood Indian, Tayo is in some sense a perfect candidate for an exploration and understanding of the untenability of any atomistic notion of human identity, particularly in the face of violence. His recognition of Josiah in the Japanese soldier opens up the possibility for him to critically reflect upon his own hybrid identity as a part of his healing ceremony and to embrace the powerful stance that it affords him. Tayo's ethnicity is suspended in a liminal space between Laguna and white identity, and therefore he seems to embody "everything the ideal Indian is not: he represents the double Other, who is discriminated against by both Whites and Natives" (Ganser 154). This "problematic ethnic, cultural, and social status of in-between-ness" is the result of his mother's "disgraceful" pregnancy by a white man in Gallup. Because of this, Tayo is in the eyes of certain members of the Laguna community the "shameful evidence of the loss of blood integrity and collective unity" (Ganser 152, Beck 150). His mere presence invites harassment from characters like Emo who consider his mother's behavior traitorous. Emo hurls

insult after malicious insult at Tayo for no purpose beyond what his impure Laguna identity signifies, calling him “half-breed” and “white trash” and accusing him of thinking he is better than the tribal community (Silko 52, 58). Emo’s dichotomizing “us vs. them” mentality defines Tayo’s mother as a traitor and Tayo’s existence as the residual proof of her betrayal. Tayo furthermore seems to perpetuate her double-crossing behavior by not taking part in the ruthless killing of enemy troops in the South Pacific: “You love Japs the way your mother loved to screw white men” (Silko 58). Emo advocates for a singularity of ethnic identity that Tayo defies in multiple ways.

Tayo is even rebuked, perhaps more perniciously, by his own family members, specifically his Auntie — his mother’s sister — who takes him in after his mother’s reckless alcoholism and prostitution renders her incapable of continuing to care for Tayo. Auntie makes a point to further the distance between Tayo and her son, both to avoid being mistaken for someone who would have an illicit affair with a white man but also to inflict a particularly cruel punishment on Tayo. She never fails to make clear Tayo’s otherness:

> Auntie had always been careful that Rocky didn’t call Tayo “brother,” and when other people mistakenly called them brothers, she was quick to correct the error. “They’re not brothers,” she’d say, “that’s Laura’s boy. You know the one.” (Silko 60)

Tayo is marked by those both in and out of his family as an outsider (Ganser 148). He carries an “inherent strangeness” that persists in his self-conception despite his and Rocky’s close relationship and even though Rocky repeatedly refers to Tayo as his brother (Beck 150; Silko 66, 236). Tayo stands as just one member of a large community of half-Indians who seem to signify the disintegration of their mothers’ tribal communities: “They had been born in Gallup. They were the ones with light-colored hair or light eyes, bushy hair and thick lips—the ones the women were ashamed to send home for their families to raise” (Silko 100). Having been sent

home to the reservation unlike many of these children, Tayo still faces enormous alienation and the absence of a true sense of belonging. The fact that he is "neither fully integrated into the Laguna Pueblo community and far from being accepted by White hegemony" seems to present the inevitability that he will fall to the fate of the "tragic mixed-blood" stereotype (Ganser 153, 150)

However, as Tayo ventures into his healing ceremony, he recognizes his own liminal and hybrid ethnicity in many people he meets. Similar to his failure to visually distinguish between Josiah and the Japanese soldier, he very literally recognizes features of his own face — his eyes — on the faces of Betonie and the dancer from whom Josiah procures the cattle. These moments of self-identification in another enable Tayo to rethink the shame and powerlessness that his mixed-blood status seems to signify. While Tayo's eyes had before served as a point to distinguish him from others, with these two characters and in the context of his recovery, they function as a uniting force (Silko 66). When Tayo initially meets the Navajo medicine man Betonie and experiences severe misgivings at the man's non-traditional healing methodologies, Tayo notices their similar hazel-green eyes and takes comfort in what that common feature potentially promises — a guide and a friend who understands Tayo's particular struggle within and without his tribal community (Silko 109). With the dancer, Silko repeatedly acknowledges this unique shared facial characteristic, and it serves as the impetus to a discussion of what their ethnic identity symbolizes to other American Indians (Silko 75, 115, 164). The dancer offers an explanation for the sort of alienation to which his mixed-blood heritage exposes him:

> "Mexican eyes," [Tayo] said, "the other kids used to tease me […] I always wished I had dark eyes like other people. When they look at me they remember things that happened. My mother." […] "They are afraid, Tayo. They feel something happening, they can see something happening around then, and it scares them. Indians or Mexicans or whites—most people are afraid of change. They

> think that if their children have the same color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing." She laughed softly. "They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves." (Silko 92)

More than provide Tayo with fulfilling personal connections with others like him, the common outsider status that their hazel-green eyes make clear allows him to understand his multi-ethnic identity in terms of the history of cultural violence between American Indian tribes and whites, contextualizing his own experience of suffering within a broader historical narrative. The tribe clings to a notion of Laguna identity that does not allow for the sort of hybridization that Tayo represents and insist instead upon a singular, pure ethnicity. Figures such as the dancer and Tayo serve as scapegoats for more fundamental anxieties about cultural survival.

Unfair as such treatment is, it offers Tayo and others like him a privileged vantage point from which to rethink Laguna identity as different cultures come into contact and collapse into one another. Ganser comments extensively upon "the positive qualities of being in-between," observing that "those who have crossed borderlines are ambivalent persons, developing a sense for complexity, dismissing rigid black-and-white patterns and clear-cut polarizations of values" (Ganser 153, 156). Betonie epitomizes this negotiation by incorporating into his rituals the knowledge and power of the white world: "Betonie's wisdom has to transcend traditions and tribal borders and cannot end where a different culture begins" (Ganser 151). These appropriations of the encroaching dominant culture "represent an awareness of the necessity for change and a recognition of the shifting white world" in which static or ossified conceptions of ethnicity cannot survive (Piper 491). In the context of increasingly intermingling ethnic groups — with first the settlement of whites and more radically with the global human community that the bomb inspires — to resist the adaptation that the circumstance of cross-cultural contact

compels means to ensure the destruction of one's community, to effectively commit suicide (Beck 151).

Taking his cue from Betonie's ceremonial methodologies, Tayo embraces the unique power that his transethnic identity affords him as a critical component of his healing ritual. In connection with my earlier mention of Larson's observation that contemporary American Indian novelists engage the ambiguity and complexity of Indian identity, Ganser points to the "crossblood" and "polycultural protagonist" archetype that often leads such explorations (Ganser 153). This figure "represents a mediating principle between contesting social formations," able to accommodate conflicting worldviews and notions of self in moments of crisis as a reenactment of what s/he has been compelled to do his/her entire life (Ganser 153). In this sense, as Tayo confronts the mutual imbrication of his personal narrative, that of his people, and that of human civilization, his already composite identity enables him to reframe the prescriptions for a singular human identity that these histories seem to mandate and to live out instead one which transcends ethnic distinctions. The "contaminated enlightenment" that Betonie advances reveals to Tayo a "counternarrative that shows 'the way all the stories fit together'" and consequently that Tayo's identity must involve them all (Beck 153). Absorbing into his person both his Laguna and white heritages, his identification with the Japanese, as well as the Mexican and Navajo backgrounds of Betonie and the dancer — whose advice and guidance are absolutely indispensable to the success of his healing ceremony — Tayo comes to embody an identity comprised of multiple, inextricable ethnicities that responds to the universal destruction promised by the bomb with a similarly universal notion of the human.

Crossbred cattle and the contaminated land

The apocalyptic potential of atomic weaponry does not threaten to annihilate only humankind, however — the range of its destruction extends to all of natural life. Accordingly, beyond transcending ethnic distinctions, the human identity that Tayo discovers throughout the course of *Ceremony* also subsumes under its scope animal life. Tayo is aligned or associated with multiple animals throughout the various stages of his journey — green bottle flies, the hummingbird, the spider, the mule, and frogs to name a few (Silko 93, 88, 98, 22, 181). Notable among these affinities is his one to the mountain lion, a creature that seems to embody precisely the sort of adaptability that Tayo seeks to emulate in the wake of his wartime experience, characterized by "relentless motion" and "changing substance and color" (Silko 182). However, the primary enunciation of his animal identity relates to the Ulibarri cattle that his Uncle Josiah had intended to raise and that Tayo reclaims as the linchpin to his healing ceremony. Along with Tayo and the other principal players in his recovery — Betonie and the dancer — the cattle are differentiated by their mixed blood. Similar to Tayo's conspicuous facial features, the cattle are physically marked by their dual heritage:

> The cows already had big Mexican brands on their sides, extending across their ribs, a brand so big you could see it for a half mile […] The brand wasn't like American brands, which were initials or letters or even numbers; it looked like a big butterfly with its wings outstretched, or two loops of rope tied together in the center. [Josiah and Tayo] added Auntie's brand, a rafter […] on the left shoulder of the cows and calves, and let them go. (Silko 74)

The composite ethnicity, if you will, of the cattle — signified here by the physical overlapping of their brands — is matched by a similarly transgressive sort of behavior: they do not respect the authority of the fences that neatly divide the land into Indian, white, and Mexican property. The cattle roam the desert finding sustenance where they can, barreling "without hesitation" through the barbed wire lattice covering the area (Silko 73). In his pursuit of the cattle, Tayo too must act

out the violation that his ethnic identity seems to symbolize, “trotting” along fences until their contours no longer accommodate his mission, at which point he follows the example of the cattle and cuts through the wire: “fences had never stopped the speckled cattle either” (Silko 219, 174). Through these actions, the cattle and Tayo both undermine a concept at the heart of the dominant culture, one which furthermore encapsulates the atomized conception of human identity that it wields: private property (Ganser 154). Much like Western ideology advances a singular notion of the self, the property system attempts to mete out the land into discrete parcels that are defined by the borders that separate them from others. As such, the example of the cattle and subsequently Tayo can be taken as a sort of antidote to the divisive, destructive vision of humanity presented by the metanarrative of Western history and the forces of witchery that drive it.

The Ulibarri serve as a foil to the obedient Herefords, another breed of cattle that cannot survive the recent bout of harsh weather and that given their characterization as “white-faced” seem to embody the sort of helpless, self-destructive mentality that white culture prescribes for Indians like Tayo (Silko 173). While Josiah’s Ulibarri are “descendants of generations of desert cattle, born in dry sand and scrubby mesquite” and consequently quite deft at finding water and food, the “weak, soft Herefords […] grew thin and died from eating thistle and burned-off cactus during the drought” (Silko 68). Yet these latter cattle are the ones uplifted in White science books as ideal, while the Ulibarri stand as an affront to Western husbandry techniques, “their whole design a ridicule of scientific breeding” (Ganser 154). The hybridity of Josiah’s cattle translates into their versatility, their ability to make do in the drought climate that the people view as more unforgiving, more extreme than ever before, a superlative characterization that

matches popular impressions of what the bomb signified for human warfare (Silko 174). The white cattle, to contrast, lack the instinct necessary to accommodate for changing circumstances:

> Herefords would not look for water. When a windmill broke down or a pool went dry, Tayo had seen them standing and waiting patiently for the truck or wagon loaded with water, or for riders to herd them to water. If nobody came and there was no snow or rain, then they died there, still waiting. (Silko 71)

In this sense, the Ulibarri and Herefords mirror the difference between Betonie, the "half-breed" medicine man, and Ku'oosh, the traditional Laguna medicine man (Ganser 154). Ku'oosh maintains Laguna ceremonial methodologies in their ostensibly original form, neglecting to incorporate the knowledge and power of other cultures that play an increasingly important role in the lives of the Laguna people and in the construction of their identities. Consequently, it seems, his healing ritual for Tayo fails. Betonie, on the other hand, succeeds as a result of negotiating among the multiple cultural and historical forces that comprise Tayo's sickness. The Ulibarri do not counter white prescriptions for atomistic identity by representing one that is purely Laguna, but rather one that — literally — crosses borders. Just as Josiah wants to raise "a new breed of cattle" to support his family and people in the context of a hostile natural environment, Tayo must tap into an unconventional identity that diverges from both ossified, singular "white" and "Indian" notions of self to heal himself and resist witchery (Silko 174). While discovering and embracing such a hybrid identity, Tayo not only recognizes himself in the cattle but also actively emulates their behavior.

Tayo mimics the cattle primarily by cutting and crossing the fences that divide the land, acts which beyond signifying his affinity to the cattle indicate that Tayo's remembered human identity is also inextricably tied with the land itself. Through his individual actions, both ones that defy as well as ones that cooperate with the laws of his environment, Tayo engages in the

defining of the landscape and through this participation embraces its role in his own identity. Silko notes in “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination” that “as offspring of the Mother Earth, the ancient Pueblo people could not conceive of themselves without a specific landscape” (Silko, “Landscape” 888). The interdependence evoked here contrasts with the separation and hierarchy that frames dominant Western models of the relationship between humans and nature, wherein human identity is fundamentally predicated upon its distinction from the latter (Dreese 5). This polarizing mentality becomes dominant over that of the Laguna or other colonized peoples by means of deterritorialization, “the method by which native or ‘primitive’ codes are erased, preparing territories for the reinscription or reterritorialization of the colonizers” (Piper 487). Tribal understandings of the land are replaced by Western ones, which manifest physically in how territory is schematized thereafter.

Despite its supremacy, the division of territory imposed by white ideology is, then, a constructed and “illusory” way to relate to the land (Piper 487). Initially afraid of the punishment he may incur as a result of crossing fences, Tayo eventually comes to understand that “the boundaries that separate Laguna from the rest of New Mexico may be legal, but they are not real” (Domina 18). The white system of property is a fiction that collapses in the face of the immutable bond that connects Lagunas to the land: “they [white people] only fool themselves when they think it is theirs. The deeds and papers don’t mean anything. It is the people who belong to the mountain” (Silko 118). Tayo must penetrate through witchery’s idea of human relation to the landscape to reveal a buried Laguna one — “continuous” rather than dissected and furthermore in which Tayo along with the rest of his community is an integral part (Domina 18). This vision is permanent and ultimately invincible regardless of the destructive, divisive ideology that currently shapes the landscape:

> The dreams had been terror at loss, at something lost forever; but nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. He had lost nothing. The snow-covered mountain remained, without regard to titles of ownership or the white ranchers who thought they possessed it. They logged the trees, they killed the deer, bear, and mountain lions, they built their fences high; but the mountain was far greater than any or all of these things. The mountain outdistances their destruction, just as love had outdistanced death. The mountain could not be lost to them, because it was in their bones; Josiah and Rocky were not far away. They were close; they had always been close. (Silko 204)

Tayo recognizes that his identity is defined by his relation to the land of his people and that despite appearances this natural, immutable connection has not been broken by white domination. The role of the land in Tayo's identity is so fundamental that it is "in [his] bones," uniting the living and the dead of the tribe and superseding whatever harm is committed by the encroachment of white habits of exploitation and destruction. Tayo's reclaiming of this relationship stems in large part from Betonie's insistence upon the ascendancy of the American Indian regard for the land over that of the whites:

> "They don't understand. We know these hills, and we are comfortable here." There was something about the way the old man said the word "comfortable." It had a different meaning—not the comfort of big houses or rich food or even clean streets, but the comfort of belonging with the land, and the peace of being with these hills. (Silko 108)

The landscape that Betonie identifies as his own has an "accretive range" that encompasses even the town of Gallup, which seems to epitomize the tragic and senseless usurpation of American Indian land by white forces (Piper 491). In his understanding, the local "Indian presence has supremacy and will not disappear" simply because white people have moved in (Piper 491). There is a sense of natural belonging that ties Betonie to the space, underpinning his sense of self and community in a way that Tayo eventually comes to understand.

However, the presence of the Western world in the American Southwest is not limited to the dive bars of Gallup and the barbed wire fences of small-time farmers. To return to the broader scale of this essay, the nexus of the metanarrative of the Western world, the dispossession of American Indians, and Tayo's own individual alienation and suffering has a specific geographic location: the Trinity site where the first nuclear device was tested, just 300 miles from Laguna (Silko 228). The development of atomic weaponry was made possible by the large-scale uranium mining that occurred throughout New Mexico and with particular prevalence on American Indian lands, including the Navajo Nation, the Grants Mining District, the United Nuclear Corporation Superfund Site, several other sub-districts within the San Mateo Basin, and the Jackpile Mine on the Laguna Pueblo (USA EPA Superfund). The Environmental Protection Agency has documented elevated levels of uranium and radium in the Rio Paguate and the Paguate Reservoir, initiating at the repeated request of the Laguna government a site cleanup in 1986 that has not been successful enough to remove the Jackpile-Paguate area from the EPA's National Priorities List (USA EPA National Priorities). In this light, witchery's damage to the land is clearly quite severe. Furthermore, by virtue of radioactive contamination, the poisoning of the earth is directly correlated to the destruction of the Laguna people: "The small spring near the Paguate village is literally the source and continuance of life for people in the area. The rivers surrounding Laguna, however, were by this time [the immediate post-war era, when Tayo returns] contaminated by radioactive poisoning" (Piper 490). The fears of nuclear fallout examined in the first section of this essay prove entirely justified for members of Laguna and other nearby tribes as they ingest radioactive water that results in damaging and often deadly disease ("Radium"). Furthermore, water in Laguna oral tradition represents the Emergence Place, the element through which the people came to identify themselves as a tribe (Piper 490). The

contamination of the water, then, presents a threat to the very core of the community's identity. Although the uranium mine that Tayo visits during the final days of his ceremony terminates operation in August 1945 — surely by no coincidence, the month the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki — the damage inflicted by such exploitative and haphazardly conducted processes persists both against the land and the people (Silko 226).

As the site of uranium mining and the development of the bomb, the area surrounding Laguna proves a "fulcrum upon which global geopolitics turns" as well as upon which Tayo's personal suffering is centered (Beck 153). Recognizing the mutual imbrication of these histories, Tayo's healing necessarily involves the land:

> From an Indian perspective, the trauma of war is not only inscribed into the body of the soldier; the nuclear defence industry with its growing power to destroy inscribes itself also into the earth. Therefore, trauma therapy can never be individual therapy alone, but is closely entangled with the macrohistory of the traumatized earth. (quoting Assmann, Ganser 149)

Donelle Dreese comments extensively upon how in postcolonial literatures "the retrieval of a sense of origin and place is central to constructions of identity," especially for cultures and communities whose sense of self is grounded in a particular location (Dreese 17). In resisting the *de*territorialization committed by colonial cultures, writers from communities subject to destruction or dissolution can engage in the nostalgic or imaginative *re*territorialization of their homeland, "a form of literary decolonization and environmental awareness in which the healing process involves remapping external and internal terrains" (Dreese 21). In a text such as *Ceremony*, "landscape or place is used metaphorically to represent sites of conflict or refuge where writers more closely examine borders and zones of human and ideological contact" (Dreese 18). Given that Tayo's very body is one of these sites — the commingling of Laguna and white heritages — the geographic "remapping" he engages in translates naturally into an

exploration and "retrieval of lost identity and a sense of place" (Dreese 21). Tayo's healing process is thus "conceived of as a painful *journey*" across the land that defined his people pre-contact and upon which now witchery's ideology of destruction and violence converges with Laguna history and Tayo's individual life (Ganser 149).

This journey of communion with the land partially involves the border-crossing that correlates to Tayo's transethnic and animal identity. Just as Tayo comes to terms with the multiple cultures and communities of which he is a part, his journey negotiates across the cultural divisions that manifest in the property layout of the landscape — including the "reservation (Laguna), national forest (Mt. Taylor), and municipality (Gallup)" (Piper 494). More than simply mirror the way Tayo bridges these ethnic and human-to-animal distinctions, however, this crossing involves Tayo's physical interaction with and consequent definition of the land. His actions do not merely symbolically replicate the hybridity of his identity but rather incorporate the land itself into that identity, thus further complicating it: "Tayo breaks open the boundaries of abstract territoriality and subjectivity through a dialectical relationship with the landscape in his wanderings" (Piper 494). Just as the land frames and enables the trauma therapy that he undergoes, Tayo participates in the processes that determine the physical layout of the land via "a dialectic between land and feet" (Piper 495). Crossing borders certainly carries political implications but more importantly forces the connection between Tayo and the earth to revitalize a relationship forgotten but essential to his humanity: "Tayo's walk is a remembering, a self-remembering and a place-remembering" (Piper 494-495). Both parallel to as well as fused with his identification with the Ulibarri cattle and multiple ethnicities, Tayo's integration with the land is a last critical component to the human identity that he recovers in the face of apocalypse.

Tayo's participatory relation to the earth is established early on in the novel. Having "prayed the rain away" in frustration at the interminable downpour he experiences in the South Pacific, Tayo's very words activate a drought at home in the Southwest (Silko 10, 13, 23). At each stage of his journey, Tayo demonstrates and explores the interdependence of him and nature, engaging in physical participation with the processes and forces of his environment. The power of these actions is most vivid when Tayo participates in pollination, in one instance literally gathering pollen with a feather and brushing it onto flowers in imitation of the "gentleness of the bees" (Silko 205). This regenerative action is reproduced later when he "kne[els] over the arching tracks the snake left in the sand and fill[s] the delicate imprints with yellow pollen" (Silko 205). Tayo is giving life back to the land just as he had taken it away by cursing the rain for the death of his brother, integrating his own actions with the processes of the earth and building a sort of community thereby. Through these actions, he is able to recognize himself as a part of the system of the environment: "In a world of crickets and wind and cottonwood trees he was almost alive again; he was visible" (Silko 96). Finally breaking forth from the unseen and unseeing status of white smoke, Tayo identifies himself within the context of a particular place and its internal relationships: "visibility for Tayo entails *relation*, a participatory presence in a familiar landscape" (Piper 489). This notion of visibility is made literal at one point when Silko depicts the cottonwood trees as "hundreds of tiny mirrors" that reflect Tayo's very face (Silko 46). Here, his appearance, the most basic identifier of who he is, is literally projected onto the landscape, representing his full integration with it.

As with his negotiation of ethnic and animal distinctions, Tayo's engagement with the land does not involve the reconciliation of mutually exclusive elements — the environment that Tayo comes to understand as his own is not the untouched idyllic image of nature typically

offered by Western ideology. The dominant binary of the human world and the natural world does not hold up, each of them having become hybridized by the other. This "contaminated" environment is the one that Tayo comes to understand as his own and with which he communes as an integral part of his healing:

> The place felt good: he leaned back against the wall until its surface pushed against his backbone solidly. He picked up a fragment of fallen plaster and drew dusty white stripes across the backs of his hands, the way ceremonial dancers sometimes did, except they used white clay, and not old plaster. It was soothing to rub the dust over his hands; he rubbed it carefully across his light brown skin, the stark white gypsum dust making a spotted pattern, and then he knew why it was done by the dancers: it connected them to the earth. He became aware of the place then, of where he was. (Silko 96)

Situated in Gallup, Tayo reconnects with a sense of place as he diverges from the use of white clay of traditional ceremony participants and covers himself instead with plaster dust — a combination of the elements of the land and human technology. The ceremonial pattern created on his skin by this material — evoking the "spotted" Ulibarri cattle — is no less legitimate or meaningful than that of his Laguna ancestors because it too enables his communion with the land (Silko 178).

Along the same line, as the Gallup plaster stands in metonymically for the encroachment and consequent transformation of Laguna land by whites, so does the uranium-contaminated water that Tayo physically communes with by drinking. Near the end of his ceremony, Tayo discovers water on the ground and scoops it to his mouth with his hands, "still warm from the sun and […] bitter" (Silko 227). Staring at the uranium mine shaft across from him, he realizes that the taste must be the result of uranium contamination (Silko 227). Participating in his landscape involves acknowledging and absorbing the "metallic" taste of the contaminated water, the physical proof of witchery's violation of Laguna sovereignty and safety (Piper 490).

Furthermore, beyond the danger associated with this contamination, this site is aligned explicitly with mass death: “the sandstone and dirt they had taken from inside the mesa was piled in mounds, in long rows, like fresh graves” (Silko 227). Tayo ingests the element that is essential to the identity of his people and a critical source of nourishment on his individual healing journey but which also here indirectly correlates to the mass death that in the frame of the novel is associated with genocide, war, and the detonation of the atomic bomb. The narratives of violence that include all of these events again converge with the story of the land and that of Tayo. But, despite the multiple layers of suffering and violence it recalls, this moment is also a time for nourishment and sustenance — not unlike the scavenging skills of the Ulibarri cattle. Death and life, destruction and regeneration, all intermingle in the human identity that Tayo realizes. His journey of self-rediscovery and healing involves reconciling opposing forces in all their complexity, ambiguity, interaction, and even codependence, rather than conquering one by wielding an absolute version of the other. As he physically integrates himself into the landscape and the landscape into himself, he incorporates all elements into his macrocosmic notion of what it means to be human in the Atomic Age.

Tayo’s union with the land is particularly apparent when he senses being subsumed into the earth itself. At one point, he feels the earth’s magnetism pulling him into its center, which “felt more familiar to him than any embrace he could remember […] he would seep into the earth and rest with the center, where the voice of the silence was familiar and the density of the dark earth loved him” (Silko 187). Note the repeated use of the word “familiar” here, which in its root invokes the notion of family and under its common usage now implies the recognition of something that is already known. “Familiar” occurs elsewhere in the novel: the multi-national voices that haunt Tayo’s sleep, Tayo’s observation of the pile of dead soldiers, the connection he

feels for the cottonwood trees around Laguna, and (Silko 5, 6-7, 95). “Unfamiliar” comes up in a comment Josiah makes on the Hereford cattle:

> “Cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something. Their stomachs get to where they can only eat rolled oats and dry alfalfa. When you turn them loose again, they go running all over. They are scared because the land is unfamiliar, and they are lost. They don’t stop being scared either, even when they look quiet and they quit running. Scared animals die off easily.” (Silko 68-69)

Given my earlier examination of the Herefords’ correlation to the human identity prescribed by witchery, the sense of familiarity that Tayo experiences as he encounters people from other ethnic groups, animals, and the Laguna landscape seems to lie at the heart of the human identity that these different identifications comprise. They are as essential to his heritage as any member of the community we typically refer to as “family” and they do not represent a new understanding but rather a rediscovery of something he already *knows* — a *knowing* as inexplicable but sure as Tayo’s *knowing* that Josiah was in the Philippine jungle, that the cure prescribed by the white doctors would never work, that the hills surrounding Gallup do not belong to the whites (Silko 114, 116, 108). As atomic weaponry unites all of creation by virtue of the apocalyptic destruction it promises, Tayo realizes that all of creation is united — and has been united — at the core of his identity as a human being.

Sunrise

These elements all seem to merge at a particular moment, when Tayo becomes acutely aware of the fragile but undeniable interconnectivity of all creation: sunrise. In this moment of perfect harmony, the destructive and life-giving aspects of the land, the animals, the people, and their histories intersect:

> All things seemed to converge there: roads and wagon trails, canyons with springs, cliff paintings and shrines, the memory of Josiah with his cattle […] distinct and strong like the violet-flowered weed that killed the mule, and the black markings on the cliffs, deep caves along the valley the Spaniards followed to their attack on Acome. Yet at that moment in the sunrise, it was all so beautiful, everything, from all directions, evenly, perfectly, balancing day with night, summer months with winter. The valley was enclosing this totality, like the mind holding all thoughts together in a single moment. The strength came from here, from this feeling. It had always been there. He stood there with the sun on his face, and he thought maybe he might make it after all. (Silko 221)

It is through the sunrise that Tayo gains full confidence in and understanding of his healing and the identity that it requires him to rediscover and embrace. As the sun hits his face — again, the physical feature that seems to encapsulate the notion of identity — Tayo is able to recognize the all-encompassing reconciliation that lies at the base of who he must be to truly recover from his personal trauma and to fight the multiple, overlapping forces of witchery that circumscribe it. The sunrise illuminates and brings together every element that Tayo realizes plays a crucial part in his macrocosmic human identity, an example for and representation of Tayo himself.

Of course, it is no coincidence that the sunrise is what encapsulates the universal human identity that apocalypse prompts. You will recall that Tayo's grandmother mistakes the blast of the Trinity testing for the sunrise (Silko 227). Both universal destruction and universal unification evoke the image of sunrise, the seemingly solar blast of the bomb paradoxically mirroring the life force that sustains all of creation. Here, the essential role that apocalypse plays in revealing Tayo's totalizing human identity becomes clear: the destruction and unification are one in the same, inextricable, co-dependent, each party in a dialectical process.

The centrality of sunrise in Tayo's rediscovery of his identity becomes clear upon an examination of his name. First, quite simply, in Japanese, "taiyou" means "sun." Tayo's very

name signifies the totalizing power of the sun as an embodiment and epitome of global violence and communion. The fact that it is a Japanese word that indicates his macrocosmic identity only further emphasizes the critical role played by the incorporation of different or even "enemy" ethnic groups into this vision of what makes us human. Second, in Tagalog, the language of the Philippines where Tayo served during the war, "tayo" means primarily "we" or "us" as well as "to stand up" as for a cause or "footing." By virtue of the multiple languages it encompasses, Tayo's name signifies the uniting of people across national and ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, the second Tagalog definition implies that such unity might be achieved in the name of a common belief — such as that of non-violence hinted at by the despondent Japanese soldiers during the Bataan Death March (Silko 40). "Footing" additionally incorporates a sense of the land into this identity, perhaps implying that by knowing where you stand in a literal sense, you know where you stand in a figurative sense. Tayo's name succinctly captures the complexity of his identity as well as the process by which he recovers it: as a window into his identity that seems almost too obvious to look through, his name has always been there but perhaps needed translation or reinterpretation to be fully understood.

The identity that Tayo discovers returns him to an idea that is fundamental to traditional Laguna notions of the self — the clan. In "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," Silko notes that "human identity is linked with all the elements of creation through the clan," which she defines as "a social unit composed of families sharing common ancestors who trace their lineage back to the Emergence where their ancestors allied themselves with certain plants or animals or elements" (Silko, "Landscape" 884). The notion that "humans, plants, and animals coexist on an equal sphere within an intimate system of connections" in which "all entities participate" and engage with one another is common to many American Indian understandings of

the world and consequently human identity (Dreese 5, Larson 19, Domina 113-114). “The ancient Pueblo vision of the world was inclusive” and insisted that humans “leave nothing out” in conceiving of themselves and in living their lives (Silko “Landscape” 886). In this sense, Tayo inherits, reclaims, and perpetuates a traditional, even ancient notion of human identity as a response to the similarly all-inclusive nature of atomic weaponry.

Conclusion

Presented Benjamin’s “momentary standstill of history” in the form of the apocalyptic potential of atomic weaponry, Tayo is given the opportunity — if not the burden — to rediscover a traditional Laguna human identity that integrates the multiple histories that frame his personal suffering and the global community of life that is subject to the destruction of the bomb (Scherpe 107). As Tayo learns “to read across the fragments of his experience and grasp the constellation of forces that has produced him,” he is able to rethink his relationship to the narrative of witchery and Western ideology as it manifests in the violence against American Indians and in World War II (Beck 152). In response to this convergence at the Trinity site and the “ultimate signifier of violence — nuclear holocaust” that it represents, Tayo integrates into his individual identity a variety of ethnicities, including Laguna, white, Japanese, Navajo, and Mexican; the mixed-blood Ulibarri and purebred Hereford cattle; and the multiple processes, interactions, and hybridizations of the landscape (Piper 485). Rather than develop from this synthesis a new identity, he returns the “human” to its enunciation in traditional Laguna culture, in which the forces of and against witchery exist dialectically and without end (Piper 485).

It is difficult to speak of the “utility” of apocalypse; to discuss the horrific, unthinkable death and destruction inflicted by the bomb or any other apocalyptic scenario in terms of the

lessons it teaches, the opportunities it opens, the possibilities it reveals. *Ceremony* demonstrates, however, that even violence of such intensity and scale, of such an historically cataclysmic nature, cannot be reduced to a singular component, cannot be thought of as absolute. To regard apocalypse without attention to what leads to it and what results from it is to ignore every moment, entity, and action's embedment within systems of inextricable relationships and histories. The genocide of American Indians, the war, the bomb, the trauma of veterans, the mutilation of the land — these are causes and consequences that have causes and consequences all their own, and to encourage the ones that promote rather than cheapen and destroy life, we have to acknowledge them all and conduct ourselves in reference to them. Betonie remarks to Tayo of the witchery that he faces, "There are no limits to this thing" (Silko 122). Accordingly, necessarily, there are no limits and can be no limits, no exclusion, in our response to it. Junot Díaz coaches us that as we face what Tayo's grandmother terms the "strongest thing on this earth," we must, like Tayo, counter it with something equally as strong (Silko 228). Against our instinct to look away, to deem unintelligible, to ignore and forget, "we must stare into the ruins—bravely, resolutely—and we must see. And then we must act" (Díaz).

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